

# **Author Interview With Valerie Davisson**

## **by Itsy Bitsy Book Bits**

### How Did You Get Into Writing?

- I started as a poet and an Anthropologist, but after a back injury, really got into the Mystery/Thriller genre. Sue Grafton, Michael Conneally, and Nevada Barr kept my mind off worrying about whether or not I was ever going to be able to get out of bed! I decided to write books I wanted to read—intelligent, character-based mysteries with a strong sense of place. My main character, Logan McKenna embodies the many strong women I knew, creating vibrant, meaningful lives for themselves, in spite of their own flaws and challenges.

### What's Your Favorite Genre to Write?

- Mystery/Thriller, of course, but poetry keeps poking its head back into my field of vision. Just like in my own reading, I like to mix it up. I have a non-fiction book, SATURDAY SALON: Bringing Conversation & Community Back Into Our Lives, and I have a couple of children's picture books mapped out. I just need an illustrator!

### Is there a genre you've always wanted to write in that you haven't yet?

- Still experimenting! And learning—we are so lucky to have access to master classes, interviews, and podcasts that bring so many authors and their work straight to our computers.

### Who are some of your inspirations?

- Sue Grafton was the first author I read in this genre, but James Michener's Hawaii and subsequent books really had an effect on me. They are probably the reason I pursued my degree in Cultural Anthropology. I also have several poets I enjoy, such as Langston Hughes and Emily Dickinson. They can sum up whole novels in just a few pithy lines.

### Do any of your stories have personal experiences in them?

- Not exactly...but many of the emotions or actions of my characters come from my own life. Overcoming obstacles, reinventing my own life after my back injury and divorce, being a mom, learning to love again, struggling with issues of belief systems. These are all things that come from my own life, but I know I share with my readers, also. And now and then, I'll pop something in there....:)

### Who are some of your favorite authors to read?

- Pearl S. Buck (The Good Earth), Michael Conneally, C. J. Box, Nevada Barr's Anna Pigeon series, Alexander McCall's Number One Detective Agency books - love those! Michael Crichton, Elly Griffiths, I love the Virgil Flowers series, too. I have a LOT of favorite authors! In non-fiction,

Yuval Noah Harari's Sapiens is one of the books I really enjoyed recently, along with his 21 Lessons for the 21st Century. The Dalai Lama's the Art of Happiness and the Tao of Pooh by Benjamin Hoff. The Dancing Wu Li Masters....don't get me started! ha My favorite children's book is Stella Luna about a young bat who learns to be true to herself.

What's your writing process look like? (Outline or go with the flow of your character)

- I use Scrivener and think in scenes, which wind up being my chapters. I do a very rough outline, but usually keep changing my mind about who is going to die and who is going to kill who. The elements I always have are the subplots that allow Logan to face a personal challenge and grow in each book, either in her career, her music, or in her relationships, such as her developing relationship with her love interest, Ben. My main process is to know my characters, then put them in tough situations and see what they do! I love being surprised as much as the reader.

What are some of your hobbies?

- Long walks, sketching, watercolor painting, gardening, walking my English Cream Golden Retriever, Finn. Cooking! The kitchen is my creative space, for sure. Again, I do not take the internet for granted. I used to be constrained by cookbooks, now I can just type in Vietnamese cilantro and find great uses for it, or 'Gluten Free Biscuits' and learn how to make those. (They're delicious, by the way...) I also like to play chess and do the New York Times Spelling Bee. Relaxes me.

Have you attended any signings? If so, what was your favorite thing about it?

- I ADORE meeting readers new and old and sharing my books with them. I have given talks at libraries and manned my little table at book fairs and had a few signings just for me. At first, they were nerve wracking - the ones where people show up just for me and I'm expected to wow them, but I am more comfortable doing in-person events now. I always learn something new, which keeps life interesting.

When reading reviews, what is something you love to see written?

- My favorite reviews are the ones that come from the heart and give specific, honest praise. Warms my heart! Authors do so much work by ourselves, at our desk, typing away at our computer, creating worlds and characters and problems for them to solve. When we polish our work to the best of our ability and finally release it to the world, it is absolutely the best thing to know someone got tremendous pleasure out of what we created.

If you could spend the day with one of your characters, who would it be and what would you do?

- Iona Slatterly, hands down! She is my most fun character. Who wouldn't want to go dancing and listen to a really good band with her and then share secrets and lessons learned? Iona is a survivor. Or maybe Tava'e...she could teach me some good chess moves.

What are you currently working on?

- LIES THAT BIND: Logan Book 6 It is one of the most challenging plotting tasks I've set for myself, but I absolutely love this story-weaving together the saga of two families, from 1932 rumrunning days to a modern homicide on the Oregon coast. Logan, of course, is in the middle of it and has to make sense of it all.

What's your writing routine?

- Mornings are my most creative time, so I try to block out a few hours before lunch for my creative writing time, then walk Finn, have lunch with my husband, and then get back to it. I write Monday through Thursday, saving Fridays for business. I set a production schedule based on word count, which keeps me on track.
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Do you have any superstitions when it comes to writing? If so, what?

- Write drunk...edit sober...LOL! Just kidding...My only superstition is not wanting to release a new book on the 13th of the month. Silly...

What is the best writing advice you've ever received?

- "Pacing pays the electric bill." -James Patterson and "I can write in a drainage ditch." - Agatha Christie

Where do you find the names for your characters?

- Sometimes they just come to me, but often, I go to the year in which that character was born and look up 'most popular names for girls 1932' or whatever. That gets me started. I also look up the meaning of names, which my reader may never realize matters, but I do. For example, one of my female character's names in the new book is Mara, which denotes sadness. Her origins are definitely sad. Another character, a Vietnamese character's name meant River and his life certainly flowed in directions he never anticipated.

What is your favorite book made into a movie/tv show?

- Absolute Power is one...Harry Potter...The Hunger Games...Hunt for Red October...there are so many!

Anything else you want your readers to know about you?

- I'd like to know more about them! I find people fascinating.

If you won the lottery what would you do with the money?

- Buy land and houses for my family. And then start some kind of foundation that focused on vital issues that need attention right now if we are to have a peaceful, healthy world. I'd have to

choose, but if I were to prioritize, it would be climate change, nuclear war, health, education and peace. As a former teacher, I would really love to revamp our education system. Clean slate!

In your everyday life how do you give back to the world?

- Good question. I think Confucious said it best. Loosely quoted: If you want a better world, make a better nation, if you want a better nation, make a better state, if you want a better state, make a better city, if you want a better city, make better families. If you want better families, improve yourself. We each need to increase our sphere of influence so that we can do the most good. Developing my skill as a writer allows me to reach people. Bringing a meal over when my neighbor has surgery-that's good, too. If we all did what we can do, even if it is small, the world's problems would be solved.

If you could give your younger self one piece of writing advice, what would it be?

- Don't wait.